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# LINCOLN MUSEUM

AND THE

*House Where Lincoln  
Died*

WASHINGTON, D. C.



*Ford's Theater after the assassination. Guards stationed outside the closed building.*

## FORD'S THEATER

THE Lincoln Museum (Ford's Theater) and the House Where Lincoln Died, in the heart of downtown Washington, commemorate the tragic death of President Lincoln, the great leader of the Nation and central figure of the War between the States.

President Lincoln was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth at Ford's Theater on the night of April 14, 1865. The President died early the following morning in a small house just across the street from the theater. The first floor of the old theater building is occupied by the Lincoln Museum. The house where the President died has been restored as of that period.

In 1834 the First Baptist Church of Washington was constructed on the site of the present Lincoln Museum. When the congregation decided to unite with another in 1859, the building was abandoned and in 1861 was acquired by John T. Ford, a theatrical producer of Baltimore and Philadelphia,

who converted it into a theater. On the night of December 30, 1862, the theater was destroyed by fire.

The cornerstone for the present building was laid on February 28, 1863, and the structure was completed a few months later. Constructed of brick and embodying the most modern improvements of that period, the theater was considered one of the finest in the United States. The seating capacity of Ford's Theater was nearly 1,700, of which 421 were in the dress circle (first balcony). There were four private boxes on each side of the stage.

The new Ford's Theater was opened to the public on the night of August 27, 1863. From that date until it was closed by the Government in April 1865, it was one of Washington's most successful amusement places, offering a galaxy of famous actors and actresses in the outstanding productions of the period.

## *The ASSASSINATION of ABRAHAM LINCOLN*

THE play presented at Ford's Theater on the night of April 14, 1865, was Tom Taylor's celebrated comedy "Our American Cousin" with Laura Keene, a distinguished actress, in the leading role. The importance of the occasion was heightened by the presence of President and Mrs. Lincoln, who had as their guests Maj. Henry R. Rathbone and his fiancee, Miss Clara Harris.

The third act of the play was drawing to a close when John Wilkes Booth, prominent actor, entered the building and made his way leisurely from the dress circle to the Presidential box, located on the right of the audience. Gaining an entrance to the vestibule of the box, the actor barred the door from within. After observing the President's position through a small hole in the inner door, Booth, familiar with the play, entered the box at 10:20 p. m., when only one actor was on the stage. Lincoln sat with his back to the door, engrossed in the play. Suddenly the fatal shot was fired and the mortally wounded President slumped in his chair.

As Major Rathbone sprang at the assassin, Booth dropped his single-shot Deringer and with his dagger stabbed Rathbone in the left arm forcing him to relinquish his hold. As Booth leaped from the box, the spur of his right boot became entangled in the colors of the U. S. Treasury Guards, decorating the center of the box. Thrown off balance, he landed awkwardly on the stage, about 11½ feet below, fracturing the large bone in his left leg above the ankle.

Booth instantly regained his feet and brandishing his dagger is asserted to have shouted

"Sic semper tyrannis" (Ever thus to tyrants), the motto of the Commonwealth of Virginia, before dashing from the stage. Maj. Joseph B. Stewart, who was in the audience, crossed the footlights, in pursuit. Escaping by the rear door, the murderer mounted his horse, held by Joseph "Peanuts" Burroughs, the stage doorkeeper, and rode rapidly out of the alley to F Street. Booth fled into Maryland, and, aided by southern sympathizers, reached Garrett's farm, near Port Royal, Va., where he was shot and killed on April 26.

*Booth crossing the stage, with Major Stewart climbing over the footlights in pursuit. Sketch by A. Berghaus, Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, May 20, 1865.*



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## PURCHASED BY THE GOVERNMENT

IMMEDIATELY following the tragedy, the War Department stationed guards outside Ford's Theater and ordered all scheduled performances canceled. In June 1865 the building was restored to Mr. Ford, who immediately made plans to reopen the theater. The opening date was set for July 10. Public opinion was aroused, however, threats were made, and the Government again took charge of the building and prohibited its use as a theater. Mr. Ford then threatened legal proceedings, whereupon the Government rented the building.

The Government began remodeling the theater into a fireproof building for the reception of Government records, August 17, 1865. All woodwork was removed and the building divided into three stories, the second and third floors supported by cast-iron columns and wrought-iron girders and beams. This work was completed in November. An act of Congress, approved April 7, 1866, provided for its purchase and appropriated \$100,000 for this purpose. For many years thereafter, the structure was occupied by various agencies of the War Department.

A second tragedy occurred in the building on June 9, 1893, when the three floors collapsed, killing 22 clerks and injuring 68 others. The building was restored the following year.

The Petersen house was purchased by the Government for \$30,000 on November 10, 1896. Its appearance today is substantially as it was in 1865.

## OLDROYD COLLECTION

IN 1931 the building was renovated and placed in readiness to receive the Osborn H. Oldroyd Collection of Lincolniana, which had been acquired by the Government in 1926 for the sum of \$50,000. This valuable collection had been gathered by Mr. Oldroyd over a period of some 60 years, and, after having been displayed in the Lincoln home in Springfield, Ill., had been brought to Washington and placed in the House Where Lincoln Died in 1893. In 1932 the greater part of it was removed to Ford's Theater.



*Photograph of Abraham Lincoln by Alexander Gardner, April 10, 1865, four days before his assassination.*

## LINCOLN MUSEUM

THE exhibits are arranged chronologically and adequate labels describe the story of Lincoln's life. Among the objects displayed are the pistol with which the President was assassinated, the Treasury Guards flag which tripped Booth, the play bill for the night of the tragedy, Booth's diary, and numerous photographs and associated material.

The collection also includes books from Lincoln's law library, the old family Bible, inscribed with the names of Abraham Lincoln and his father, Thomas Lincoln; letters and documents relating to his early career, and many other personal mementos.

There are also political exhibits, campaign songs, a series of newspaper cartoons, posters, paintings, engravings, badges, and hundreds of other objects—all pertaining to the life of Lincoln.

## VISITOR SERVICE AND FACILITIES

FORD'S Theater (Lincoln Museum), located at 511 Tenth Street NW., between E and F Streets, is open to visitors from 9 a. m. to 9 p. m. on weekdays. The House Where Lincoln Died, just across the street from the theater at 516 Tenth Street, is open to the public from 9 a. m. to 5:30 p. m. during the week. Both buildings open at 12:30 and close at the usual time on Sundays and holidays. A fee of 10 cents for admission, plus tax, is charged visitors 17 years of age and older to each place, with the exception of members of high-school groups who are admitted free through 18 years of age. No parking facilities are available for automobiles.

## ADMINISTRATION

BOTH the Lincoln Museum and House Where Lincoln Died are national memorials administered by National Capital Parks for the National Park Service, Department of the Interior. All inquiries should be addressed to Irving C. Root, Superintendent, National Capital Parks, Washington 25, D. C.

Other areas relating to Lincoln, administered by the National Park Service, are: Abraham Lincoln National Historical Park, Hodgenville, Ky.; Gettysburg National Military Park, Gettysburg, Pa.; and Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D. C.

The following booklets relating to Lincoln and to the National Park Service areas associated with his life and work have been

issued by the National Park Service and may be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D. C., at prices listed:

Abraham Lincoln National Historical Park, 16-page illustrated booklet, 10 cents a copy.

Gettysburg National Military Park, 16-page illustrated booklet, 10 cents a copy.

Abraham Lincoln; From His Own Words and Contemporary Accounts, National Park Service Source Book Series Number 2, 20 cents a copy.



House Where Lincoln Died, 453 (now 516)  
Tenth Street NW.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, *Harold L. Ickes, Secretary*  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, *Newton B. Drury, Director*  
NATIONAL CAPITAL PARKS